

# **STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**

## **INTER-DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION**

### **Draft 2011-2020 Ten-Year Plan GACIT Public Hearing Executive Council District 5**

**September 29, 2009**

**Location: Nashua City Hall Auditorium 7:00 p.m.**

Councilor Pignatelli opened the meeting with an overview of the Ten Year Plan process and schedule. The Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT), comprised of the five Executive Councilors and the NHDOT Commissioner, are responsible for updating the Ten Year Plan every two years. This meeting's purpose, one of 37 scheduled throughout the state, was to receive public input on the proposed draft 2011-2020 Ten Year Plan. Public input can be forwarded to the NHDOT until November 13, 2009. GACIT is scheduled to meet on November 18, 2009 to consider the plan in light of input received and make final recommendations for the Ten Year Plan to the Governor in December, who in turn will review and present the plan to the Legislature in January for their action. By June 2010, there should be a legislatively approved 2011-2020 Ten Year Plan.

Kerrie Diers, Executive Director, Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) gave a history of NRPC noting that they serve Nashua and twelve other communities. NRPC was formed 50 years ago to assist the Nashua and Hudson region with studying traffic and circulation for finding easier ways to cross the region. Tim Roache, Assistant Director of NRPC gave an overview of the regional perspective as it related to the Ten Year Planning process. He noted the responsibilities of the Regional Planning Commission and MPO, process to identify transportation priorities for the region's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and how that feeds into the Ten Year Plan process. In the Nashua Region, the Ten Year Plan prioritization process started in February 2009. Through the Transportation Advisory Committee and MPO process, a prioritized listing was approved and forwarded to NHDOT that verified the status of projects within reasonable financial constraints, and tried to address regional schedules and priorities. For the third straight update of the Ten Year Plan, NRPC did not recommend the addition of new projects to the Ten Year Plan. The MPO recognized that, given financial constraints, it was not reasonable or prudent to try and put forward new projects. Existing projects need to be maintained. Tim identified that the focus for the MPO was keeping the CMAQ funds already approved for rail in the Nashua area, Broad Street Parkway, and the NH 101 and 101A Corridors.

Jeff Brillhart, NHDOT Assistant Commissioner, gave a broad overview of the financial/budgeting background, capital needs and priorities, and the implications towards the update for the 2011-2020 Ten Year Plan. A number of issues affecting the Department and the Ten Year Plan were presented including:

- The existing 2009-2018 Ten Year Plan was developed with a very disciplined approach towards financial constraint, resulting in a credible financially responsible Plan.
- The 2009-2018 Ten Year Plan prioritized the preservation of existing transportation infrastructure, repair of red listed bridges, and the widening of I-93, which continue to be the focus areas of the 2011-2020 Draft Ten Year Plan.
- NH received about \$130M in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds that addressed many deferred maintenance needs throughout the state of NH. ARRA provided funds to resurface 750 miles of roads in 2009, as compared to the 250 mile average that has been achieved with available funding over the last few years. While helpful to address these deferred needs, it is only a one time boost to the program and does not substantially impact the overall Ten Year Plan.
- The FY 2010-2011 State Budget focused on meeting the day to day operational needs of NHDOT and provides \$135M in new revenue to meet those needs, provides additional funding for Cities and Towns through the Block Grant Aid Program, and additional funding for the Betterment Program which will help to maintain paving needs (target 500 miles annually). To address operational needs the FY 2010-2011 State Budget also impacted the funding of the state's transportation capital needs. Indirect (overhead) rates for NHDOT's administration of the Federal program were increased from 3% to a more accurate 10%. (approximately \$17.4M/biennium). Also, state matching funds for federal funds (hard match) are not included in the budget. Instead, due to NHDOT's robust efforts on the Turnpike System, Turnpike Toll Credits are being utilized, allowing the state to use federal funds at approximately 100% instead of the usual 80%. Use of Toll Credits reduces funding levels available for capital projects by about \$15M or more per year and upwards of \$150M over the life of the Ten Year Plan.
- In recognition of these revenue issues, the budget bill establishes a Legislative Financial Commission to study and make recommendations for long term highway and transportation funding solutions. The makeup of this committee includes representatives from the Governor's Office, State Representatives and Senators, NHDOT, NHDOS and others. Recommendations from the Commission are due in late 2010 to inform the next biennial budget.

- Federal revenues are also problematic. The current Federal authorization bill expired at end of September 2009. It is expected that there will be continuing resolutions that extend the current legislation for up to 18 months until Congress can come to terms with transportation needs and the necessary revenue to pay for them. The Federal Highway Trust Fund required an \$8B transfer in FY 2008 and \$7B in FY 2009 to remain solvent. There is much uncertainty and speculation about the future Federal Reauthorization bill. Uncertain funding levels and structure of the program make it very difficult to predict what NH may receive in the future.
- Additional capital needs to be considered in the 2011-2020 Ten Year Plan development total at least \$800M involving new projects identified by the Department and Regional Planning Commissions, additional funding for preservation and red listed bridges, prior identified projects that remain unfunded, other specific needs, and unfunded I-93 capacity improvements. Other needs not specifically quantified but recognized as areas that require attention include additional focus on posted/weight restricted bridges, municipal highway and bridge programs, secondary and unnumbered state roads, funding assistance to cities/urban areas, and funding needed to support rail, transit and aeronautics priorities.
- The 2011-2020 Draft Ten Year Plan is therefore developed in recognition of these budgeting implications. It is predicated on financially conservative assumptions that existing state and federal funding levels will remain at current levels, and the application of Turnpike Toll Credits will continue for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, the Draft Ten Year Plan is not terribly different than the existing Ten Year Plan. Existing projects have been reaffirmed and minor reprioritizations of existing projects are proposed. There is no solicitation for new projects. Programmatic preservation and maintenance projects are continued.
- The 2011-2020 Draft Ten Year Plan priorities continue to focus on infrastructure preservation, aggressively address red listed bridges, and bringing forward the I-93 improvements. The draft plan involves a disciplined financially constrained planning approach, while working with the Financial Commission to consider longer term funding approaches.
- Advancing major projects such as I-93 relying solely on federal program funding is difficult. Throughout the country, no major projects are being advanced without considering other means of dedicated funding such as bonding, tolling, public-private partnerships, vehicle miles traveled mechanisms or other dedicated revenue source.
- One alternative for funding I-93 improvements that is being considered is through a demonstration project that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is offering. This program would allow tolling on the interstate

to fund the unmet needs for capital and maintenance expenses. This would facilitate the completion of I-93 sooner than would otherwise be possible and within the Ten Year Plan timeframe. More importantly, this would free up funds (approximately \$150M in the Ten Year Plan for I-93 debt service) that could go toward funding other statewide capital needs.

- NHDOT's continued focus will be on preserving and maintaining our existing infrastructures, addressing red listed bridges and rebuilding I-93 while working with others to address the uncertainty of funding to address the needs of the State. There will be continued dialogue and efforts to find a better way to accomplish the I-93 project.

The following comments from those in the audience were raised and discussed:

- Leon Kenison, Nashua Public Works Director, spoke on behalf of Mayor Donnalee Lozeau, and said that the City of Nashua shares the "dire straits" of Department relative to needs and funding. The City urges that the programs in the current draft of the Ten Year Plan be retained including aviation, rail, and highway. The City still wants Broad Street Parkway, Broad Street West (NH Route 130), 101A, and the rail project that will benefit the region. The City also requests that maintenance include resurfacing of the FE Everett Turnpike due to its age and high traffic volumes.
- Fred Lynch, commented that he commutes on Route 3 south and notes a lack of police presence. He requested that funds be used for increased enforcement to deal with speeders. He commented on the need to keep the roads safer, and not just to widen them.

Commissioner Campbell responded that he works with Commissioner John Barthelmes, Department of Safety. He commented that \$9 million is received in fines and \$4 million goes to the Department of Safety that used to go to the State's General Fund. NHDOT Bureau of Turnpikes gives \$6.6 million to State Police.

- Shirley Rayburn commented that the merge from Exit 6 to Exit 8 on the Turnpike, is difficult.  
The Department acknowledged her comment and will review the situation.
- Shirley Rayburn commented that on the Boston Express service the senior rates had been raised been raised from \$17 to \$25 by NHDOT, not the bus company.

Commissioner Campbell responded that the bus service had been running for one year and is funded with 80% FTA funds. Boston Express determined the peak hours. Boston Express did put in place multi-ride discounted tickets that can be used anytime, particularly by commuters. We would clarify that the option of senior/disabled half-fare, is available but can only be used during off-peak hours. An application for this fare is available on the bus service website,

BostonExpressbus.com. However, the senior/disabled half-fare cannot be applied to the already discounted multi-ride tickets.

- Daniel Richardson, former Nashua Alderman, commented that the Circumferential Highway is not in the Draft Ten Year Plan. He also commented that the northern bridge crossing that goes through a Nashua neighborhood by the junior high school, through Greely Park, and connects to the Henri Burke Highway should be removed. He said the original plan with the bridge in Merrimack is good. He also said that with a public-private partnership, the public may not get the best deal.
- Bob Carlson, Zoning Board of Adjustment member and abutter to the proposed northern bridge, said the Board of Alderman had passed an ordinance against the northern bridge crossing proposed to connect to HB Highway. He asked where the bridge would be crossing, and if any thought had been given to federal funding. He said there is opposition to the location that helps the developer of the Beza property.

Representative Cindy Rosenwald, Ward 3 also voiced concerns about the northern bridge crossing, particularly lack of competition where the operator could raise tolls.

A request was made that the northern bridge crossing not be designated the Nashua-Hudson project which is perceived as meaning the location connecting through the residential area to HB Highway.

Assistant Commissioner Jeff Brillhart confirmed that the Circumferential Highway is not in the Ten Year Plan which is financially constrained. He also noted that the northern bridge crossing is listed but unfunded. He explained that the Department is aware of the resistance to the Nashua-Hudson bridge crossing located south of the location proposed for the Circumferential Highway. If a northern bridge crossing goes forward, the project would go back to a design and environmental review process to determine the least environmentally damaging practicable location with opportunities for public comment and a Public Hearing. The name designation "Nashua-Hudson" will be revised to Merrimack-Litchfield in keeping with the original location as part of the Circumferential Highway.

- Brian McCarthy, Vice President of the Nashua Board of Alderman, expressed support for commuter rail that could bring employees from points south to the area for high tech jobs. Senator Betty Laskey has been working towards commuter rail for fifteen years and noted that with the forming of the NH Rail Transit Authority and resolution of the liability issue, progress has been made. Representative Michael O'Brien expressed support for commuter rail, and feels that property values will increase with rail access to Boston. Fred Lynch and Courtney Eschborn expressed support for bringing commuter rail to Nashua.

Councilor Pignatelli asked for a show of hands on people supporting rail, and the majority, nearly unanimous, raised their hands supporting the rail.

James Vayo asked questions about the commuter rail project(s) in the Draft Ten Year Plan including Nashua #13117 for a 1000 space park-and-ride near the railroad. He asked if the decision had been made whether there will be one or two stations in Nashua and feels that the City has not been given the opportunity to comment and come to consensus on location. He noted eight smart growth planning principles.

Commissioner George Campbell responded to the positive comments supporting rail. He explained that President Obama has made available \$8 billion to establish high-speed intercity rail. NHDOT is considering a development grant and operating grant. He explained there are two ways to fund the rail project, FTA funding for commuter rail or ARRA funding for intercity rail. New Hampshire cannot get an operating agreement with Pan-Am, owner of the railroad, to run on the corridor in New Hampshire, but can get to Nashua. New Hampshire is talking with Amtrak who has the authority to run inter-city service on the Pan-Am tracks. Commissioner Campbell said he is very anxious to have the service start sooner than later, but the chances of getting the whole corridor open to Concord are limited, and not having an operating agreement and using Amtrak lessens the chances. He explained that to do the Nashua leg is approximately \$90 million with \$36 million for the tracks, \$20 million/each for two train, and the station and other costs for the remainder. This would require a 20% match of \$18 million.

- Barbara Pressly asked about the status of two projects including Exit 36 south and the tollbooth in Nashua. She wants Exit 36 in the Ten Year Plan believing it would ease traffic. She is against the tollbooth in Nashua.

Assistant Commissioner Brillhart responded that Exit 36 was not included in the last Ten Year Plan, partly because it is spending New Hampshire funds to build highway improvements in Massachusetts, and because it is more of a local project addressing more localized needs.

Commissioner Campbell explained the Legislature passed the budget including \$85 million from registration fees that will be sunsetted at the end of the budget. The budget also established the eleven-member Transportation Finance Commission that is charged with figuring out how to fund transportation long term. Their report is due by November 2011. Funding continues to be an important issue. With that said, the Department does not have an active project to install tolls in Nashua.

- Lee Newcomb expressed thanks for the new bicycle rules and for the work on bicycle and pedestrian issues. He asked that bicycle safety be considered in projects including Broad Street Parkway, the new northern bridge crossing, and the project from Dublin St to Coliseum Ave. He noted two intersections with bicycle issues for the Milford-Nashua 101A project. He supports driver education relative to bicycle and pedestrian safety.

The hearing was adjourned at 8:47 PM.

